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SANITY AND SAFETY IN RELATION TO PUBLIC OFFICE.

BY AILAN M'LANE HAMILTON, M.D., ETC.

THE words "safe" and "sane" have been used so frequently of late in connection with the coming Presidential election, the possession of those qualities by the candidates for high office being even made an issue by many, that it is of interest to question the relation of mental integrity or the reverse to the action of public officials generally; and, in this connection, it may not be amiss to refer to the peculiarities of the mental organization that may play a part in the conduct of men who fill important trusts, and in whom is invested a certain amount of power, which, if used improperly, may be to the detriment of certain communities, as well as of the country at large.

It need hardly be said that a public officer should be a well-balanced and mentally healthy man, in whom no suspicion of pathological weakness exists; yet, unfortunately, the line between normal mentality and its opposite is so confused, irregular and ill-defined that it is impossible to apply an absolute standard of psychic integrity, and the popular idea of what constitutes stability and all-round fitness is often at fault. This is inevitable so long as men by mere force forge ahead of their fellows, who rarely take into account defects which are overshadowed by apparent conventional soundness. General capability is rare, and not always to be expected; and absolute perfection, after all, means mediocrity. It is variety that gives individualism; and, provided there be no abnormal one-sidedness, we may be most unequal in our mental make-up, and still be well balanced.

Most of us are so willing to be infected with the genius of others that, often without due exercise of judgment, we choose an ideal

and worship him, until calm, sober second thought and experience convince us of his shortcomings or actual weakness. In monarchical governments, there is little escape from the burden of a line of hereditary weaklings; but, in republics, the limitation of official tenure sooner or later brings relief, even though we suffer temporarily for the hasty choice of the majority. Le Bon has made plain the contagious nature of example, and the complete upsetting, at times, of deliberate judgment under the stress of suggestion; of the infectious will of one person which has imposed upon others who are receptive and yielding; and of the disregard, as well, of all the restraints of common sense, so that a species of general hypnotism exists during a period of excitement. This sheeplike tendency of the crowd is only too well known to psychiatrists and sociologists. Almost from the beginning of history, we find that communities have been deranged to the limit of epidemic madness by the appearance and example of spurious Messiahs, political lunatics and other individuals who have applied the torch of delirious excitement and kindled the fire of turbulent fanaticism.

The analysis of every suddenly developed popular movement is likely to disclose some hysterical weakness, which is usually dependent upon an individual act of heroic proportions, or started by an appeal to the emotional side of the masses. Sometimes it has a religious tinge, and again it may be purely martial;* or, again, in times of general corruption, a valorous champion of the people may appear upon the scene. The long-suffering public will at these times impulsively flock to the standard of a self-satisfied leader, who may be some half-crazy reformer whose plans for relief and prediction of better things appeal more or less strongly. As a rule, his promises are empty, and the efforts cease when power has been actually placed in his hands, his subsequent career being

* It would seem to-day, especially, as if many ill-balanced officials were possessed by a spirit of personal exaltation, with an allied disposition to indulge in more or less harmful heroics. The *motif* is militarism of a hysterical kind, with a disposition, as far as possible, in time of trouble, to ignore the ordinary and long-established forms of available legal relief, which until now have been all-sufficient. This epidemic madness has even extended to Colorado, and Mr. Wellman's interview with a former "rough-rider" is suggestive of what is meant. This valorous gentleman, in response to an inquiry, is said to have replied: "Well, they started up that *habeas corpus* business, and I told 'em that wasn't any good—that what they needed was not *habeas corpus* but *post mortem*, etc."

characterized by occasional picturesque, and usually impotent, attacks upon vice which lead to nothing. The claims of such an individual are vapid, and his methods are distasteful to the confiding and mistaken victims who have pinned their faith upon him and invested him, perhaps, with extraordinary prerogatives. He is as likely as not to be a member of a certain large class of the unbalanced, recognized by the alienist, which comprises the victims of *paranoia reformatoria*. Possessed of little or no stability of mind, or power of judgment, he makes startling and dramatic raids upon the wrong-doer, disregarding the law which should guide him; or, if invested with the dangerous power of distorting the criminal law, he puts out of sight the rights of the unfortunate and perhaps innocent, or through sheer incapacity allows the guilty to escape. Not content with the sober and well-established precepts and methods of his calling, he resorts to others that are both outrageous and sensational. In this connection, the writer recalls the conduct of an eccentric and insanely conceited judge of a criminal court, who, in an important case, proceeded to interrogate a witness who was called to the stand, but from whom the prosecuting attorney, or the prisoner's counsel, could extort nothing. After admonishing the witness to disregard all others in the court-room and to look him "fixedly in the eye," he proceeded to searchingly interrogate, despite the objections and astonishment of both lawyers. There was something familiar and distinctly uncanny in the form of questions asked and in the conduct of the inquisitor, which recalled to the writer the Bernheim method of hypnotizing. It subsequently appeared that the judge admitted to a legal friend that he had bought and studied a well-known book upon the subject of hypnotism, and that he "found great aid in the use of suggestion." Luckily, the power of such a man is limited by the higher courts, but he is in every way a psychopathic example of what I mean. The saddest instances of mental deterioration are those which develop after a long, honorable and eminently sane career. Many old New York lawyers can recall the sudden transformation of an originally excellent judge who became insane, and subsequently rivalled the famous Jeffries in the cruelty and severity of his sentences, and who was allowed, through feelings of sympathy and pity, to remain on the bench for a long time, until his condition became so obvious that he was sent to an asylum, where he died.

In other lands, where the will of the people has so little to do with the choice of a ruler, we are furnished with numerous historical examples of the danger of hereditary mental defects. The lines of Hapsburg and Hohenzollern illustrate what is meant; and, though in both houses notable exceptions exist, there being immunes, like the first Emperor William, it is not difficult to find a distinct insane trace, which in times more remote found expression in cruelty, oppression and unmistakable insanity of other kinds, or, in recent times, by a mental degeneration which is strikingly exemplified in the present German sovereign. Though brilliant and vigorous in certain directions, as are many paranoiacs, his conduct is erratic and impetuous; and no one can possibly predict what form his latest explosion may take. Possessed of an idea of his own power and almost god-like supremacy, which more closely resembles that of the arbitrary rulers of less civilized ages, his delusional sense of greatness leads him to indulge in all sorts of eccentric and disorderly forms of the exercise of power. Though his attempts to regulate the art of Germany and to teach sculptors, artists, actors and musicians, and even ballet girls, are evidences of mild insane conceit, and do no great harm, his power for mischief is really dangerous when he becomes, as he does at times, the subject of a species of semi-religious exaltation. This was his condition when he addressed his troops previous to their departure for China, urging them "to kill." Again, his exaggerated sense of personal importance has led him to direct or bring about punishments for *lèse-majesté* which are not only extreme, but at times ridiculous. It has been said that the interfering criticism of this monarch is not due to an exaggerated estimate of his own capacity only, but to his own conception of his duty as an Emperor; and in this connection one of his critics has recently said: "It is a conception too apt to lead a man into an endeavor to set up a Napoleonic despotism over his subjects' feelings and tastes, and it is not surprising that the German artists, no less than the public, have resented such interference."

There are a number of degenerates whose mental weakness is of such nature that they are only regarded by their fellows as queer or odd, and who perform acts from time to time which are distinctly praiseworthy or even of apparent greatness, the really insane conduct in other directions being for that reason forgiven or overlooked. To this class of dysphrenics belong many indi-

viduals who are largely in the public eye. Ridicule is the usual reward of the querulous, litigating, reforming or extreme genius whose public career is marked by absurd acts so constantly exhibited as to make him a public bore. The soldier of a day struts about covered with decorations procured by misrepresentation, and indulges in the form of insane boasting known as "*pseudologia fantastica*." The lawyer brings questionable lawsuits for the benefit of a public who do not need his help, or constantly figures in the newspapers, and the reformer of a certain character is always ready to interfere with the affairs and comfort of his fellows, provided he can get sufficient *kudos*, or even for the mere pleasure derived from meddling.

The morbid personality varies greatly in different individuals, and it does not follow that there is always moral degeneration. The motives of many of these unstable persons, to whom the name "mattoid" has been applied, have often been of the highest and best, and characterized by a distinct altruism. Indeed, this disregard of self has materially aided progress under certain circumstances. Unfortunately, the impulse of the psychopathic subject to do good, to relieve the down-trodden, or to correct evil, is not connected with a state of mind which enables him to properly recognize the consequences of a precipitate or tactless use of power. Such a person may be altruistic; but, as a rule, he unconsciously, in a measure, acts for the gratification of an insane vanity, or in obedience to an elation approaching morbidity. These men, and others, delight in personal decoration, in being photographed upon every occasion, and in oratorical efforts which are windy and empty, except that they sometimes leave in the mind of the auditor a catchy epigram or euphonious saying to be remembered. In all the strong qualities of mind they are deficient, and their mental processes and results are scattering and valueless. In reality, there is no balance, and, as in hysteria, there is often a morbid excitability of the memory, leading them to falsify unconsciously, or to live over in detail perfectly imaginary incidents, so that the individual believes himself a hero. With this exists what is known as the "facilitated release of volitional impulse" which is so characteristic of childhood. This unstable state is characterized by hyper-suggestibility, so that he responds very readily to all accidental influences. The emotional tinge leads such people to "mould" experience into conformity with them-

selves, and with this there is a morbid excitability of the imagination. There is usually an inadequate functioning of the judgment and reason, and a tendency to live ever in a fool's paradise.

Deffendorf, in speaking of the mental characteristics of the large class of unbalanced individuals who are not conspicuously insane, says:

"But, just as soon as anything extraordinary occurs, a mental shock or a temptation which demands discussion and decision of action, the mental and moral incapacity becomes evident. There is this item of susceptibility to new and accidental influences, which renders their view of the outside world incomplete and fragmentary. Such vague pictures lead to faulty conception, and form a basis for inaccurate judgment. As soon as ideation leaves the purely sensory field, the logical train of thought yields to the influence of lively imagination, while the sharp definition characteristic of general ideas disappears. Circumstances existing only in their imagination are of far more importance in their deliberation than actual facts. Thought, therefore, becomes unsteady, and shows many inconsistencies; patients vacillate in their plans from day to day, draw inconsistent conclusions from the same premises, and thus their views of life and the world lack reality. Their flighty conversation contains frequent repetition of certain high-sounding remarks and commonplaces, which often have little bearing on the case."

The popular standard of official sanity, rectitude, greatness, goodness and general capability, associated with calm dignity and temperamental stability, is undoubtedly that which has been fixed by most of our countrymen, who have been brought up to revere the memory of the first President of the United States. Possibly, some of this veneration is due to the influence of time, that has led to the amplification of those virtues which preponderated, and dwarfed the faults which, at most, were of the minor kind; for history is always disposed sooner or later to paint with extremes of color, so that she ultimately glorifies, or even deifies, on the one hand, or belittles or execrates on the other. An English critic has recently said that our American Presidents have been chosen from the ranks of those who possess no striking traits personally, nor suggest force,—in other words, that the only standard is that of mediocrity; and that, for this reason, they have been safe; but such a conclusion is by no means true. This kind of "mediocrity," which has had so much to do with the steady development of the country, has had no more striking exemplar in recent years than Mr. McKinley, whose administration will for-

ever be looked upon as one marked by stability, business-like methods, and official acts free from sensationalism, but far-reaching in effect. Like the living Cleveland, McKinley was moderate, calm, logical and deliberate, and rarely made mistakes; and here, as in other cases, we find that native mental vigor which was so conspicuous in the case of Lincoln, and is always evidence of the intellectual strength possessed by those who have hewn their own way, and from the beginning, largely through necessity, have been forced to cultivate their faculties—the result being a healthy mentality in which a high degree of reasoning power and judgment prevails. In the rugged American this exists, perhaps, to a greater degree than among other people; and the best kind of mental health is found amongst those whose advancement in life is connected with a struggle, more or less intense. In other words, they are really “born to greatness” in its best sense; for, in the beginning, they have everything to make, and, when the time comes for wider action and greater responsibility, they are prepared and competent.

In spite of political exigencies, and because of the temporary jingoism or hysterical excitement inseparably connected with the war crises of our country, men who were neither great in other ways than as soldiers, nor especially efficient, have been chosen. The long list of Presidents contains a large proportion of sane and useful men who have intelligently and successfully filled the first office of the land, and no less than nineteen of these were lawyers, a fact which confirms De Tocqueville’s observation that the legal training is that which best qualifies and makes Presidents. In this connection, Mr. Olney, in his thoughtful speech before the Harvard Law School Association a few weeks ago, said: “I believe, and prefer to believe, that the lawyers of the day have not abdicated what is their normal function under every government having a right to be free or enlightened—that they are still the ruling class in our country, in the sense that, in matters of law and of government, they determine the predominant tone of the community.” Six of our Presidents, including the immortal Washington, were soldiers, who, through the enthusiasm inspired by their valor, or in consequence of the gratitude of the people, were thus rewarded; but, with few exceptions, it cannot be said that these men were as successful as those who came from civil life, and in four cases the martial prowess seems

to have been the only qualification. At best, they have been indifferent Presidents; and sometimes, owing to their impulsiveness, they have been anything but "safe." As an example, while Andrew Jackson was, on the whole, a strong man, his impetuous temper, obstinacy and high-handed exercise of power betrayed a mental unfitness which led to general public uneasiness, and at times something more. When, in the face of the House and the Senate, he ruined the United States Bank in 1829, and subsequently created widespread disaster, although ultimately the withdrawal of government funds into the public treasury was beneficial, the means chosen were arbitrary and unnecessary. But, in spite of this disregard of immediate consequences to others, he was popular and great enough to successfully fulfil his administration; whereas men who have imitated his arbitrary methods have ingloriously failed; and it can be seen how an insanely arrogant and egotistic individual, invested with enough power, might cause widespread ruin through an arbitrary act. While Jackson had a conscious sense of his own strength, was fearless and independent to a dangerous degree, there were underlying sterling qualities which redeemed him. So far as the writer knows, no President or high official of the United States has ever been disqualified by reason of mental disease; although, without doubt, certain psychopathic individuals have been allowed to show their mental peculiarities to the discomfort of their associates. John Randolph, of Roanoke, was certainly of unsound mind, and it is not difficult to trace in his conduct a form of insanity to which reference has been already made. Among some people, there seems to be a disposition to consider the great Lincoln as not absolutely of sound mind, and whatever gave rise to such a view was undoubtedly due to his melancholy temperament, and to a certain strain of religious feeling which was occasionally expressed in a manner that was not entirely understood. It has even been asserted that he had hallucinations, but that appears to be unfounded in fact. In a personal letter to the writer his biographer, the Hon. John Hay, says: "He was a man of deeply religious feeling, rather than theological beliefs. There was a vein of mysticism which characterized him in all his life, but he was not what I would call superstitious, and so far as I know, he had no hallucinations." Although strikingly eccentric, his peculiarities of character, which did not in the least affect his phenomenal

greatness of mind, were largely the result of early environment and education.

The nomination of candidates for public offices of all kinds is too often made by those who do not inquire sufficiently as to the mental fitness of the men of their choice, whose estimate of what is required is superficial and one-sided. Such a person is too often taken at his own estimate, and if he be possessed of sufficient persistence and suggestive force his success may be due to the popular wave of excitement which he creates. Though the intelligent minority recognizes the mental deficiencies, which are familiar enough to the student of morbid psychology, the voting majority is apt to be delighted by fulminating manner and speech, the display of intense energy, which at times is laudable enough, but is apt to fizzle out before some great public work is barely launched.

Sudden changes in feeling or purpose, so characteristic of psychopathic subjects, are the rule, and the absence of tenacity of purpose, except so far as it applies to self-advancement of the individual, is conspicuous. Such characters rarely possess the independent moral courage which brings with it preparedness for disaster; nor the knowledge that even failure and criticism, and sometimes execration, on the part of the public and the press, count for nothing in the consciousness of right, and in the performance of duty. The great office of President, especially, should be filled by a man with administrative and executive ability, who has a thorough respect for the Constitution, and who possesses logical training, poise, modesty and self-control. The steed of Boulanger should not be used to carry a person into the White House, nor can the end be obtained by any number of *tours de force*. On the contrary, the successful and suitable candidate should come from the ranks of those whose lives have been marked by sturdiness and mental sobriety, and by careers that require development of thought, and that kind of force which is cumulative and generated by the gradual perfection of all the intellectual faculties, and of none at the expense of others.

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